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162nd Soldiers conduct security mission in Guatemala

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FORT POLK, La. -- Training Soldiers is nothing new to the Soldiers of 2nd Battalion "Vanguard," 353rd Infantry Regiment, 162d Infantry "Tiger" Brigade. In fact, over the last 18 months, the battalion trained more than 120 Security Force Advise and Assist Teams and provided observer/coach-trainer support to more than 85 SFAATs during combat training center rotations. Until recently, the Vanguard Soldiers focused training on preparing units to deploy as advisors.

In September, 16 observer/coach-trainers from the Vanguards took on the mission of becoming advisors themselves.

The Soldiers trained a new unit along Guatemala's northern border with Mexico: The Guatemalan Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF). The IATF is a battalion-sized task force comprised of Guatemalan army soldiers, national civil police, national counter-narcotics agents, and Ministry of Justice personnel. The IATF is a unit developed and funded with the assistance of U.S. Army Southern Command and the Security Cooperation Office in Guatemala City.

The IATF's mission is to improve internal security and strengthen the presence of the government in Guatemala's northern border region, an area heavily controlled by drug trafficking organizations and organized crime. From a U.S. standpoint, this translates to the seizure of drugs that would be otherwise destined for the U.S.

The Guatemalan military is a light infantry fighting force special-



162nd Infantry Brigade Soldiers train side-by-side with their Guatemalan counterparts during a day of physical fitness events in commemoration of Guatemala's Independence Day Sept. 15. Sgt. 1st Class Jaime Garza (on litter), Staff Sgt. Wilfredo Lopezgarcia (right of Garza), and Staff Sgt. Gregory Antoine (behind Lopezgarcia) competed in a litter carry-event with Guatemalan army and national police officers.

ized to operate in mountain and jungle terrain. The IATF is developing a new motorized capacity for the Guatemalan armed forces centered on new J8 armored Jeeps equipped with .30 caliber Browning machine guns. With numerous deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan,

and thousands of cumulative combat patrols as a base of experience, the 162nd Inf Bde trainers were a natural fit to assist the IATF in meeting their training objectives. The 162nd Soldiers deployed for three weeks to help train the IATF on four specific tasks: Zone recon-

naissance, convoy security operations, mounted maneuver techniques and traffic control point operations.

The 162nd Inf Bde trainers approached this mission as an oppor-

Please see 162nd, page 6

162nd

Continued from page 1

tunity to share lessons learned from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The trainers emphasized showing the IATF "a way" to accomplish tasks, as opposed to "the way." The goal was to assist in the development of an effective platoon team capable of meeting challenges during mounted operations in a high threat environment. Training focused on developing crews capable of performing assigned duties to enhance combat survivability.

In the end, the mission was a success for both forces. The 162nd successfully trained six IATF platoons, and is now better prepared to train regionally aligned forces for security force assistance and security cooperation missions in Latin America, and the IATF is better prepared to operate in a mounted environment to improve Guatemala's internal security.

6/ Guardian
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162nd Infantry Brigade trainers (center, from left) Sgt. Hector Contreras, Staff Sgt. Wilfredo Lopezgarcia, and Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Rodgers observe a Guatemalan national police officer conduct a personnel search during the FY13 IATF Training Mission held in Guatemala in September.